



CASUALTY WATCH

Casualty Watch was initiated by Southwark CHC at King's College Hospital (London) in 1990 when it discovered trolley waits of up to 20 hours in King's A&E department. It was developed by Southwark CHC into the co-ordinated monitoring of 30 – 40 acute hospitals in London and the South East. The project involves CHCs going to their local A&E department at 4.30pm on the last Monday of every month (excluding Bank Holidays), to collect data on the length of waits, diagnosis, plans for treatment, and age of A & E patients. This monthly exercise, collated and disseminated by Southwark CHC, provides the only published London-wide snapshot of the patients' experience of A & E services.

London Health Link formed a joint Steering Group with Southwark CHC to support the project as well as analyse the monthly data for patient care issues. The Group compared the official patient waits recorded by the Department of Health with actual waits experienced from time of arrival and found huge discrepancies. For historical reasons dating back to 1995, the Department's system only records part of the wait, from the decision to admit, ignoring the long wait to see the doctor in the first place or to receive test results for example. In the most extreme case, the 24 hour wait of an elderly patient in a London A & E department was recorded as a thirty minute wait under the Department's system. Patients who are not admitted are not recorded as waiting at all.

The official data was clearly inadequate and failed to reveal to the Department of Health that some patients, many of whom are elderly and frail, suffer a very poor experience at a time of great anxiety. This system fails to meet the needs of those who depend upon it. We are pressing for major reform nationally to the outmoded A & E system and are pleased that this is now being considered.

It is now time to build on the excellent work achieved through Casualty Watch to build a more complete picture of the quality of hospital emergency services in the capital. London health Link agreed a Project Plan to expand Casualty Watch to include cancelled operations, delayed discharges, beds open, numbers of medical outliers and emergency admissions. In addition, ITU Watch is to be restarted. This was pioneered by the Greater London Association of Community Health Councils, which closed two years ago when its funding was withdrawn. We are seeking funding to expand the project.

ACHCEW manages the annual national Casualty Watch, which is very successful. In the debate over the future of CHCs, Casualty Watch has been cited as an example of influential, co-ordinated, independent monitoring, which must not be lost. We are determined to proceed with its expansion this year, to leave a comprehensive snapshot of emergency care in London, to be taken up by a successor body if necessary. Donald Roy continued to chair the Steering Group until June 2000 when Elizabeth Manero took over. Much hard work was also done by Malcolm Alexander, Chief Officer of Southwark CHC and founder of Casualty Watch, as well as Mary Arroyo, who undertakes the monthly analysis of the figures and Ivan who devised and adapted the software.

Elizabeth Manero, Chair Casualty Watch Steering Group (June 2000) 9.05.01